Protest Cultures
A Companion

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Edited by

Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke,
and Joachim Scharloth

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Chapter 21

Action's Design

Tali Hatuka

General Definition of the Term

Design, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is "a plan or scheme conceived in the mind" and intended for subsequent execution, or the preliminary idea that is to be carried into effect by action. In this sense, an act of protest is a design—a planned event envisioned in the minds of its organizers—with two purposes: an external purpose in which protestors confront a target and thereby enhance the impact of their political message, and an internal purpose in which protestors confront themselves, thereby intensifying emotional and political solidarity among participants. At the heart of both purposes is a scheme—a designed action with social, spatial, and material dimensions. In other words, as a call for attention to a particular ideology, the action of protest is, first and foremost, a planned display whereby protesters design and use their available means to express beliefs and ideas.

Role in Protest Cultures

To further illustrate what the design of a protest entails, we delineate a few interconnected defining factors such as symbolic and communication practices, the forms of human gathering, and order and surveillance, all of which contribute to the dissent's physical and cultural significance.

Generally, the design of an action assumes a relationship of interaction among participants. The connection between leaders, participants, and

viewers during the event is carefully planned, with particular physical/spatial relationships. For example, a speaker standing in a center of a circular space would project a message of being part of the crowd, emerging from it, as opposed to a speaker standing on a high podium at the edge of a rectangular space, evoking a distinct hierarchy and theatricality. While spatial proportions and building masses affect participants' movements and their symbolic meaning, it is also the case that the physical setting of a protest—whether held in an institutional space like a civic square, in a leisure place like park, or in the city streets—is often modified by the installation of a stage, microphones, flags, and posters, which reinforce the visual and textual symbols of the event. In terms of designing a protest, the choice of location is also closely connected to the expected and desired number of participants, which depends on the space's attributes of surveillance and control.

In addition to the effect of space on the form of human gathering, timing and scale are also critical to defining the action's design. By timing, we mean whether an event is held during the day or night, whether it is short or long, repetitive or singular. By scale, we mean the size of a place and the number of people it can host (scale of place) and whether the protest takes place at the local, national, or global level (scale of protest), as well as their interrelationships. These two factors, timing and scale, have a crucial impact on the choice of place for the action. Thus, for example in a case of a mass congregation, a monumental space contributes to transforming the individual into an anonymous participant, an integral part of a unified entity. When this same place is empty, the scale and physical features of its space are a continuous reminder of the regime's power as well as action's monumentality.

In an action's production of symbols and strategies, the media is a critical component that influences political decision-making and public opinion, thus acting as a decisive participant in protest. For this reason, the design of an action must include a way to engage with the media to attract attention. In fact, advocates of social change have now come to depend on the use of media. At the same time, protest activities have helped fill the media's need for a steady supply of spectacular images and stories, thus creating an interdependent relationship that must be acknowledged as part of an event's design.

Order is another key component of a protest, designating two interrelated systems: the order of the assembly and the order of the space. The order of the assembly and its ritual performance components (i.e., marching, gathering, singing, clothing, even the scheduled timing and length of the event) represent the way participants see themselves either as supporters or protesters against social order, all within the culture of their society.[1]

This order has a dual role: it is a mechanism for constructing meaning and for interpreting social reality, and it is a device for negotiating between the state and the citizen. The order of the assembly takes place within the arrangement of a physical space, which includes the setting's topography, boundaries, traffic movements, and building uses (i.e., governmental, commercial, or residential). The space's setting and design, defined by architects and authorities, are representations of the civic identity of the society. For example, when protestors march together, they aim to reclaim or symbolically possess their city, or particular public spaces in the city. They modify (temporarily) the daily hum of urban life with dynamic vocal and visual messages through which they challenge the established social order identified with the dominant powers. Thus, the form of a march and its route are critical to attracting spectators and additional participants. As such, marching in the main plaza of a city or passing by government buildings indicates the intention of the protestors to communicate with officials and challenge or sway their decisions. Marching in residential areas or gathering at nongovernmental venues outside of the center indicates the group's intention to protest far from the hegemonic powers, as a contraposition to them. By extension, the group can then be seen as imposing their order over whatever space they occupy.

The well-known example of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, marching in circles, reveals how an innovative act emerges from both the space's design (the paved circle around the monument) and the legal limitations of protesting against the regime. This example shows how groups appropriate space by redefining its access, appearance, and representation, and reclaim the space by using some of its physical attributes, modifying its cultural origin. Another example is the Israeli "Women in Black" who temporarily appropriate "informal public spaces" throughout Israel every Friday afternoon.[2] These relatively small groups have the power to decide their own spatial configuration, performance acts, and means of action. However, in a case of large assemblies, it is the powers (i.e., the political parties or institutions) that define the spatial configuration of the crowd by planning the size of the space to best suit the number of people assembling, enhancing the sense of togetherness and solidarity among participants, both reinforcing the crowd's perception of its own power and reassuring those in power.

Surveillance practices, in use in most public spaces, are an integral part of the planning of any protests. Some of the space characteristics are modified temporarily to fit the order of the action, with barriers, blocked routes, and adjusted traffic rules controlling the order of the crowd's movement. In addition, police attempt to maintain this order through additional means of surveillance, such as cameras and secret agents in a crowd, to remain alert

Figure 21.1. Forms of gatherings, Buenos Aires, 2006. © Photo by Tali Hatuka

Figure 21.2. Forms of gatherings, London, 2007. © Photo by Tali Hatuka

to any form of violence that might occur. Yet, in many assemblies, there is direct coordination between the organizers (activists or political powers) and the police.[3] This coordination is often seen as desirable by both sides, with the first seeing it as a means of keeping safe and the latter as a means of maintaining civil order.

Surveillance is also empowered by modern technology and is clearly the most effective means of achieving what Foucault has called "docile bodies," citizens targeted by power control.[4] Furthermore, the increased media attention provides additional surveillance, controlling events simultaneously from above and on the ground. However, one must be careful when using these terms, as surveillance and enforced order *can* be challenged through sociopolitical agencies, as in the case of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, who operated under a military coup. The order's significance, of both assembly and space, is that it serves as a means of control, but it can also become a means of liberation and mediation.

There is also the question of overdesign and aestheticizing of the action that is often associated with totalitarian regimes. This was evident with the Nazi party, which relied on carefully contrived architectural orchestration and lighting, as in the 1934 Zeppelin Field event masterminded by the architect Albert Speer. Speer directed a battery of 130 antiaircraft searchlights in the night sky to create his famous "cathedral of light." By developing the sublime in Nazi Germany, argues Leach,[5] the architecture set the scene for an aesthetic celebration of the violence that underpinned Fascist thinking, thereby enlisting architectural aesthetics to serve political power and increase the tensions between ideologies and ethics.

These parameters—symbolic meaning, scale and the form of gathering, order, and surveillance—along with cultural and functional definitions, play a crucial role in the design of a protest's action and in producing meaning (see Table 21.1). It is these parameters that frame a protest's form (i.e., design or structure) and practice (i.e., enactment). Being flexible and dynamic, these parameters express citizens' negotiations among themselves and with the regime, thus making the logic of how they are put together crucial to how they work, and to that which their designs enable them to accomplish.[6]

Research Gaps and Open Questions

Protests are designed and planned actions, with event physicality affecting both the participants' movement and performance as well as the sociospatial definition of the protest. However, the relationship between protest and space has not been studied in depth. In part, the reason for this derives

Table 21.1. Matrix of Action's Design

Parameters of action design	*Symbolic and communication practices*	*Forms of gathering*	*Order and surveillance*
Form	Influences ritual performance components	Subjective to social norms, configurations of appropriation	Negotiates with authorities/permits
Scale	Affects interaction among participants (internal)	Affects size of assemblies (small/large, formal/informal)	Affects order of assembly and order of space
Media	Boosts message and impact (external)	Defined in expectation of possible media coverage	Contributes to control practices
Place	Impacts rhythm and symbols on action's message	Affects event's form and scale	Impacts control management (by participants)

from the historical and theoretical development of protest analysis in the social sciences, in which culture, behavior, reasoning, and mobility have been the main parameters rather than the physical and formal settings of the protest itself. The physical implications of protest in the architecture of civic squares has not received much attention, nor has the use of the public arena. Recent studies have addressed the role of built spaces in constructing a national identity,[7] focusing on architecture as a cultural artifact within intricate power geometries.[8] Particular attention has been paid to the architectural concept of buildings as mediators between civic society and its urban image.[9] Yet, addressing questions such as what makes citizens choose protest? or why do they choose a particular form of protest and how do they use space?, expand the theoretical understanding of the relationship between the action's meaning and the action's physicality.

Tali Hatuka is an architect, urban planner, and head of the Laboratory of Contemporary Urban Design in the Department of Geography and Human Environment at Tel Aviv University. Hatuka works primarily on social, planning, and architectural issues, focusing on the relationships between urban regeneration and development, violence, and life in contemporary society. Her recent book, *Revisioning Moments: Violent Acts and Urban Space in Con-*

temporary Tel Aviv was published both in English (Austin, TX, 2010) and Hebrew (Tel Aviv, 2008). Her work has been published in a wide range of journals, including the *Journal of Urban Design International, the Journal of Architecture, the Journal of Architecture and Planning Research, Planning Perspectives, Political Geography,* and *Geopolitics*.

Notes

1. Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge, 1990).
2. Tova Benski, "Breaching Events and the Emotional Reactions of the Public: Women in Black in Israel," in *Emotions and Social Movements,* ed. H Flam and D King (New York, 2005), 57–78.
3. For further reading on situations when these agreements are violated by violence, see Tali Hatuka, "Negotiating Space: Analyzing Jaffa Protest's Form, Intention and Violence, October 27th 1933," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 35 (2008): 93–106; Aysegul Baykan and Tali Hatuka, "Politics and Culture in the Making of a City-Center: The Case of Taksim Square, Istanbul," *Planning Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2010): 49–68.
4. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York, 1995).
5. Neil Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture* (Cambridge, 1999).
6. Handelman, *Models and Mirrors,* 16.
7. Sibel Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle, 2001); Abidin Kunso, *Behind the Postcolonial* (London, 2000); Lawrence J Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (New Haven, CT, 1992).
8. Lisa Findley, *Building Change* (London, 2005); Kim Dovey, *Framing Places* (London, 1999).
9. Richard Sennett, *The Spaces of Democracy* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1998).

Recommended Reading

Canetti, Elias. *Crowds and Power.* New York, 1962. Reviews the way crowds form, develop, and dissolve, using the taxonomy of mass movement as a key to the dynamics of social life.

D'Arcus, Bruce. *Boundaries of Dissent: Protest and State Power in the Media Age.* New York, 2006. On the media role and its contribution to the scale and boundaries of protest.

Findley, Lisa. *Building Change.* London, 2005. Illustrates the relationships between power, space, and architecture.

Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior.* New Brunswick, NJ, 2005. Examines public events' design and organization as a means to understand the ritual in relation to the world within which it is created and practiced.

Mayo, James M. "Propaganda with Design: Environmental Dramaturgy in the Political Rally." *Journal of Architectural Education* 32, no. 2 (1978): 24–32. Addresses the link between the form of space and the design of protest.